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THE AMERICAN JEW: HIS PROBLEMS AND HIS PSYCHOLOGY

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There have been three waves of Jewish immigration into America. The first immigrants, in the early days of settlement, were Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch Jews with all their splendid background of breeding and culture. Their numbers were small. They intermarried with Christians and with the second wave of German-Jewish immigration which reached our shores in the forties and fifties. For these reasons they have almost disappeared, despite their pride of family and the wish to keep themselves distinct. The German immigration settled here and prospered, contributing much to that fine body of stable, hard-working, clear-thinking citizens who make up our great middle class. The flood tide of immigration was reached after the May Laws of Russia in the eighties, which created the Pale. This amounted to a flight of a whole people. These last comers found their homes in the crowded centers of the great cities. They sought employment in the vocations to which they were trained, more particularly in the needle trades and clothing industry; this was their work in the old country; to this they set themselves on arrival here. They have achieved remarkable success and are pushing the German-Jewish group from places of influence and power by their overwhelming numbers.

The older resident groups, those who have been here for several generations, are as different from these, their brethren, as men of different races. They cannot understand the adherence to the old marks that characterize the ghettos of Europe. The inhabitants of the ghettos in the American

cities seem all out of harmony with American life as we understand it. And so the two largest groups remain divided, having little in common, eyeing each other with more of suspicion than sympathy, yet suffering together the burden of Jewry.

Grave problems which arise out of this situation face the American Jew; problems we should be frank to realize, and to the solution of which American Israel must set itself. We must not be swept from our moorings because we are in the minority. The influence of the immigrant Jew is cast definitely in the scale of exclusiveness, clannishness. Such institutions as the Jewish parochial schools or the tendency to inject into our American political system European conceptions of group rights and minority privileges must be combated with all our influence and all our power.

The greatest task which confronts American Jewry is the problem of the younger people among our immigrant population. The attitude of the older generation is easily understood. They seek refuge in the authority of the past; they dig back to origins and attempt to assert themselves by a futile clinging to the old, in the endeavor to stay the flood that is sweeping away their offspring. This uncompromising attitude, as much as the disintegrating influence of the struggles to readjust themselves, is the cause of the greatest number of the unsynagogued, the indifferent, the criminal, and the anti-social among our immigrant brethren. Despairing of any real observance of the faith as they have learned it and practiced it, gripped in the tyranny of the economic machine, knowing no other interpretation of Judaism—for from the beginning the liberal interpretation of Judaism was pictured to them as shameful heresy—they break completely with the past. Rejoicing in the untrammelled freedom of the new land, they cast aside, with the shackles of their old political tyranny, the restraining tenets and practices of the only Judaism they know. They cut the roots and would start anew. And this

is the tragedy of the immigrant Jew—and, let us not mistake, the tragedy of all American Israel too, for the position of American Jewry can never be stronger than the regard in which the least of our brethren is held. The people to whom traditions were sacred and the spirit of law and obedience to discipline were the highest imperatives in life shows a tragic disregard for law, fills the courts of our crowded centers with transgressors and the papers with Jewish names associated with crime.

It is evident that something should be done. The non-Jew will not distinguish between Jew and Jew, between up-town and down-town Jew, between reform and orthodox Jew, between immigrant and older resident. We cannot stand aloof in complacent superiority announcing that we, the older residents, are different, and expect to escape the contumely. The consequences are equally dangerous for us as for our immigrant brethren. We should and must come to realize that this problem of the immigrant Jew is the problem of the whole household of American Israel.

I do not believe we have given the immigrant in our midst the sort of welcome which he needed. This applies not only to the immigrant Jew but to all our immigrant population. We have organized our great philanthropies, and generous has been the response of the older residents. But for the most part we have thrown the immigrant into the stream of American life and left him to swim for himself. The Jewish immigrant needed by his nature, craved from his soul, something more than a full stomach. The terrible pressure of economic life, together with his natural desire to be with his fellow-countrymen, and also his wish to live near a synagogue and so observe his religious customs, forced him into the crowded sections of our cities, there to live or to die. We expected the natural laws of adjustment to Americanize him. And America, great and vibrant being that she is, engulfed him in the maelstrom. In a very short time he learned the superficialities

of American life, the ways of politics, the veneers of the American spirit, and when he had fulfilled the allotted time he became a citizen—but without ever knowing spiritually the land of his adoption. We became annoyed when he did not dress and talk and think like us. We became alarmed when he cut loose from his past entirely. At the same time we took no care to maintain within him the spiritual values of his old life nor to appropriate those values to strengthen, beautify, and stabilize our American and our Jewish life. And we are paying the price in vast numbers of indifferentists, in economic discontent, in broken family morale, in disloyalty, disintegration, and crime.

You see then the great difficulties which are confronting us. The great mass of American Jews, including the immigrant, is law-abiding. The heritage of reverence and respect for the law is deeply ingrained in the Jewish character and expresses itself in obedience to constituted authority. This lawlessness is the reflex of previous restrictions, the growing-pains of adaptation to the new environment. Even in Russia, though names of Jews are prominent in the Bolshevik movement, the great mass of Jews is known to be opposed to the Bolshevik program of appropriation, confiscation, and terror.

One of the most interesting phases of the situation is the attempt which certain Christian bodies are making to take advantage of the drifting, unmoored Jewish mass and convert it to Christianity. Large sums of money are being appropriated for this work. Such a policy should be a challenge to American Jewry which we should hail, not in anger, but as an opportunity. Pride should stimulate American Jews that others should not do the work which is inherently our own: of arousing an active interest in religion.

The situation is by no means a desperate one. My experience with the children of the immigrant fills me with a great hopefulness. I have found a latent idealism among most of the immigrants and children of the immigrants which expresses

itself in other than Jewish ways simply because it has never been given an opportunity to realize itself Jewishly. Through these many weary centuries of oppression the Jew, thrown back upon himself, sought and found solace and inspiration in the vast store of Jewish literature, rich in idealism. Herein he read and studied day and night. The darkness of the ghetto was lighted by the faith and spirituality of his poets, philosophers, and teachers. All this idealism has been choked down, repressed, but it has accumulated in the Jewish heart and soul; and all this restrained but stored-up energy and spiritual passion are ready to break through into the present and flow into the stream of American Jewish life, enriching and glorifying America and Jewish life in America. This idealism rooted in the genius of the Jew can best express itself after its own kind—in a Jewish way. These our brethren can best serve the country as citizens if they serve it as Jews. It is our duty as Jews to capture this *Élan*, to organize and direct it; to give it the means for conscious realization; it is our duty as American Jews to see to it that our household is well ordered, that our children contribute their full share to the stabilization of American life.

This, then, is the situation in American Israel. It is the story of a great people attempting to adapt itself to a new and different atmosphere. It is the heartbreaking effort to remain loyal to its heritage in the maelstrom of an environment that it does not yet completely understand, and which as yet does not understand it. If American Israel is blameworthy, it is in this, that it is not striving mightily enough to unite all the discordant factions into a single race-conscious, God-conscious people. Upon the Jewish population of the United States rests the first responsibility to redeem the delinquent in its ranks by a revival of loyalty to the best traditions of the Jewish faith and the Jewish people. A clear understanding of the situation by Jews themselves, the will to work together in harmony as Jews and Americans, must inevitably precede

any intelligent effort to counteract anti-Semitism in the United States.

Several other charges demand refutation. They are based upon a misunderstanding of the psychology of the Jew. I would have you see this Jewish soul as it grapples with itself, as it seeks to express itself in our world. I would have you know how the Jew regards himself in relation to other peoples, to America, to his God.

It is said that the Jew is a distinct nationality; that he will never completely identify himself with the American Republic because he is intensely nation-conscious!

The war brought into recognition new definitions of the terms *nation* and *nationality*. A *nation* is a political organization. It is the mechanism and institution of government which a people creates to secure its stability and ordered progress. *Nationality* is the spiritual background or backgrounds of a nation. For instance, the United States of America is but one nation; in the American nation there are as many nationalities as there are peoples who have come here from other lands.

The Jews are not a *nation*. Many Jews of the world are opposed to the creation of a Jewish nation. The question of Zionism nearly caused a schism a few years since in the ranks of American Israel. Even today great bodies of liberal and orthodox Jews refuse to support the movement for Palestinian restoration, because they fear it may lead to the creation of a nation. There are those who believe in a Jewish homeland, who believe there should be one place in the world where the Jewish soul shall have the unhindered opportunity to express itself in a culture of its own. As a matter of fact, the Zionist policy itself has undergone radical changes since the Balfour Declaration. The most that is hoped for, and that at the end of a long period of time, perhaps many decades, is the establishment of autonomy under the continued suzerainty of Great Britain. The immediate emphasis is on the

philanthropic, practical, cultural, and spiritual aspects of the movement.

That the Jews of the United States do not constitute a nation, a people with divided loyalty, is not debatable for a moment. I need hold no brief for the patriotism of the American Jew. He came with Columbus; he fought with Washington; he made possible the continued struggle for American independence. Jewish blood consecrates every American battlefield in every war from the earliest days. American Jews, conscious of the freedom they enjoy here, realizing the concordance of American ideals with Jewish ideals, will ever be ready to take their places, shoulder to shoulder with their fellow-Americans, as they have in the past, in defense of the institutions of this blessed land. They want no other country. They spurn any other allegiance. Their love of America is writ in a story of Jewish blood and Jewish sacrifice! The native-born Jew and the immigrant Jew with broken English unite at least in eloquent testimony to their devotion to these United States. No—the Jews are not and do not desire a nation!

The Jews are a *nationality*.

If a common past, a common history, common sacrifice and suffering, the same language and literature, if a common hope and ideal and a common faith, constitute the spiritual background of a people, then are we a nationality. But this is a spiritual allegiance and not a political loyalty. And our Christian brethren with their splendid background of Christian historic tradition will be able to understand it. Of course, with us there is this difference: in addition to the bond of union as believers in the same religion, Judaism, there is the consciousness of peoplehood—the realization that we belong to a people, the Jewish people. This consciousness is frequently lost wilfully by renegade Jews or lessened in the process of adaptation; but the outside world, through prejudice or discrimination, or barriers in business and social life, forces upon us Jews—even upon those who would forget—the

knowledge that we belong to a distinct people. The best type of American Jew is eager to proclaim his fealty to Judaism; is willing to accept the discomforts of being a Jew.

If we are to be convicted because we are true to ourselves, true to the best in our past; if we are to be convicted because of our willingness to bend our necks to the slaughterer in refusal to relinquish truth as we conceive it; then upon the nations of the earth who make the unholy claim be the blame—not upon us! It is our duty to be ourselves. The tragedy is the greater in that many among us are not loyal. On the other hand, we do not feel the narrow chauvinism which sees only good in Jews, which recognizes no evil in the household of Israel. But we must be what we are, Jews, by the blood that flows in our veins, by the faith and sacrifice of unnumbered of our fathers.

Again, it is said: The Jews are against society, against the gentile scheme of things. Someone has remarked of the Jew that he is a democrat against monarchy; a socialist against democracy, and a Bolshevik against the socialist state. We are iconoclasts, lawbreakers, revolutionists.

The Jewish people is not obliged to defend the opinion of individual Jews. Without doubt the foregoing describes most aptly many of my coreligionists. Just as truly it describes many who profess Christianity. But to say that the Jew and Judaism are against society and Christian civilization is to exhibit either ignorance or hate or both.

Many years ago one man's heart was gripped by the wrong, injustice, inhumanity, and illiberality of the world. This man's soul was enthralled by a vision of brotherhood, of a time of justice and of peace. He taught his children thus to dream, and they their children's children, till a whole people felt the divine call to so live that these ideals should be realized in the institutions and relations of men.

The Jewish soul has always kindled to a flame when injustice rose in the land. It is no accident that the prophets

were Jews. It is no accident that Jesus was a Jew. It is no accident that Jews throughout the world today are striving to better conditions among men.

When an instinctive longing of the soul is met by cruel repression it will burst its bonds and make itself manifest—usually to an extravagant degree. The Jew is essentially a personalist. God is a reality to him. He identifies God's interests with his own. God demands that he cry out against unrighteousness and wrong wherever they may be. He feels called to do the work of God in cleaning the dirty places of the world, in binding up the wounds of society, in creating such an order as shall make men free. Therefore, wherever there is injustice, there Jewish arms are lifted as instruments of God for the right; wherever there is hate, there Jewish hearts are found as ministers of love.

If we are accused of anarchy, revolution, and destruction, I would answer that *some Jews* are leaders in these movements, because their innate sense of justice, long rebelling against oppression, yet unable to express itself, swings now to the extreme of radicalism. The wonder is that every Jew in Russia and Poland and Roumania is not an anarchist. But the discipline exacted by the faith makes law-abiding citizens of the vast majority. According to the Jew, law, a fundamental attribute of the universe, must likewise determine the freedom of the individual. The passion of his soul for liberty and justice, for himself and others, is tempered by the discipline of his Torah, is humanized by his concept of God, the universal Father, whose children are his brothers.

If we are accused of being protestants, disturbers of the peace, I answer that we would protest against the wrongs and inequities of modern society; we would disturb the smug content of them that eat of the fleshpots of Egypt; we would destroy the peace of them who sit at ease in Zion! Where there are sin and misery, superstition and error, prejudice and hate, wrong and injustice in the world, when there is God's

work to do, we cannot abide in our tents at peace. We summon to this hallowed crusade, not only the loyal among our own, but those from the folds of our Christian brethren, that together in the blessed fellowship of a common cause we may wage the battle against the forces of tyranny to capture for the poor and the weak the inalienable rights of freemen. Jewish discontent is constructive!

I have purposely emphasized the religious conditions in American Israel and described the psychology of the Jew, because an understanding of these things will show the baselessness of the charges against us and will dispel the anxiety of those who fear us. When the Jew breaks from the spiritual heritage of his people and his faith, then he becomes a menace; he breeds Jewish criminals and Jewish radicals and gives just cause for Christian condemnation.

I confess we must sweep before our own doors! Before we cry out by reason of the prejudice of the world against us we must tear out of our hearts the prejudices we have against our own brethren. An awful responsibility rests upon the Jew in America to realize in his personal life as husband, parent, child, friend, and citizen those noble ideals which his faith enjoins upon him. Jewish capitalists and employers should conceive it to be their highest duty as Jews, out of the rich storehouse of our prophets' inspiration for social justice, to apply in their relations with their employees such high standards of justice and benevolence that they will lead the way to a peace of industrial democracy here in America. Jewish manufacturers and leaders of industry must show that their capital is ready to become the stepping-stone for the new economic organization of society, which shall be based upon the right. Jewish laborers must not ally themselves with the hinderers, radicals, and destructionists, who delay the ordered progress of society, sow the seed of hate among us, divide the body politic into angry groups, and bring misfortune to thousands. To the Jewish employer and the

Jewish worker I would say: According to our religion, God and man are partners in the work of the world. The work we do is His work. Beyond the obligation we owe our fellow-men and sanctifying that obligation is the figure of God! "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it." The eyes of the non-Jewish world are upon us. They expect more from the Jew. They demand more from the Jew. And rightly! For the Jew considers himself a mission people. If we presume to call ourselves leaders of righteousness, in God's name we should so live that our example shall be worthy of emulation. If we "would be priests ministering to a world, we must first sanctify ourselves!"

Would that the Jews of America would see these things! Too many of my people shut God out of their lives. They would not be Jews. They would be something else. An aching discontent gnaws at their hearts. They are hungry and thirsty. They crowd the shrines of lesser cults without the law. They believe they find healing and salvation at other waters than the rivers of Jordan. They know not why this anguish, this hectic neurosis, this tragic madness. I know: It is because they would not be themselves. It is because they have forgotten God.

Would that my people should understand these things! The physical characteristics of the Jew may be lost as he reacts to the environment of freedom. The back may be straightened, the form heightened, the face lose its rugged, crude, and elemental strength. But the Jewish heart throbs within him. The Jewish soul is unchanged!

Would God my people would heed these things! Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ha-Levi, Maimonides, Mendelssohn—all his people's seers and prophets and poets—live in the Jew of today. Their inspiration forms the fabric of his being. Their redeeming revelations are graven on his heart. He is born with them. They live again in him. The Jew's past

is in his soul. He cannot forget it, no matter how much he would. He cannot blot it out. It is the heritage of his birth. It haunts him. It gives him no peace. God has chosen the Jew! God will not let him alone! The Jew abandons his God? Turns his back upon him? Ah, he cannot! "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in the nether-world, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there would Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand would hold me." It was written. It is so. All the mighty imperatives of his tragic past, all the martyrdom of his people, rise up to agonize his heart with a thousand discontents. He becomes restless, unhappy, a cynic, a debaucher, an anarchist—a lonely, lonely seeker who gropes blindly in the dark! But—God comes into his soul and he is transfigured! The prophets live again. The poets sing. The Jew serves! He has answered the call of his God. He has fulfilled the divine purpose for which he was created: He is a blessing!

Prejudice will die out only when there is no fuel to call it forth. When all is said and done, prejudice cannot be fought with prejudice; but it can be met by courage; it can be conquered by love; it can be overcome by service! When the world hates us, let us love; when the world reviles us, let us serve! The only justification for our separateness is that which our history, our literature, and our tradition teach us: to exemplify the reality of God in our daily lives and in our relations with our fellows.

America charges the Jew to be himself. America expects the Jew to give himself to his faith and his people. America is rightly alarmed at the lack of Jewish loyalty to Jewish ideals. America charges every Jew that the responsibility for the unsynagogued, the delinquent, the criminal, the anarchic Jew, is upon him. America demands not that he forsake his

faith; America proclaims: I do not want you, renegade Jew. I do not respect you, disloyal Jew. You do me no good. You do me harm. America declares: You serve me best when you serve me as a Jew!

Let the Jews of America accept the challenge! Let them lay upon their souls the burden of a new consecration. Let my people strip from their hearts the narrow and petty prejudices which divide them, which make their efforts futile, which hold them up to scorn! Let them cling fast to the spiritual imperatives of our great tradition. Let them eschew the fleshpots of Egypt and the worship of the golden calf. Let them throw themselves upon the God of their fathers as their forebears have done in days gone by. Let them serve the Lord God with all their hearts and all their souls and all their might with the old cry: I shall not die but I shall live and declare the deeds of the Lord! We shall have naught to fear. Our fellow-citizens shall have naught to blame.